

Community Liaison on Board for 2015 Revision to RI Wildlife Action Plan (RI WAP)

Beginning in 1937 with the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (better known as the Pittman–Robertson Act for its Congressional sponsors) and followed by the Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration Act, Congress began to identify a need to protect wildlife species that were suffering from overhunting and habitat degradation. These Acts and their subsequent amendments established excise taxes on certain hunting and fishing equipment. Revenue from these taxes is reallocated to

the states to fund research, management, education, and other activities related to fish and wildlife conservation. Since hunters and fisherman bear the financial burden of this program through taxes on their equipment, the funds generated are primarily focused toward the conservation of game species (wild harvested animals). While these laws have achieved a great deal since their enactment, conservation of *non-game* species remained unfunded for many years, and **wildlife habitat across the country continues to be developed and degraded.**



Eastern Box Turtle

Photo by Christopher Raithel



Black-throated Blue Warbler

Photo by Jay Osenkowski

In 2000, recognizing the value of non-game species to the landscape, Congress created the **State Wildlife Grants (SWG) Program** to support conservation of declining fish and wildlife species not covered by previous legislation. To ensure that states would use their funding effectively, Congress mandated that each state submit a Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) and update that plan no less than every ten years in order to be eligible for program funding.

The **Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan (RI WAP)** was first published in 2005 and will be updated in 2015. RI WAP is a comprehensive, long-range plan that assesses the health of the state's wildlife and habitats, identifies the threats they face, and outlines actions to help our rarest species recover and keep common species common. As our communities grow, ***RI WAP can serve as a blueprint to help us fulfill our responsibility to conserve wildlife and the places they live for future generations.***

There are eight Congressionally required elements in the Wildlife Action Plan (*shown in the graphic below*). In preparation for the 2015 RI WAP update, approximately 50 scientific experts have worked to develop the first four elements of the plan (species, habitats, threats, and actions). Additionally, over 125 technical experts and key conservation stakeholders have reviewed these findings and weighed in on these discussions. The complete list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Rhode Island will be available on DEM's website at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/swap15.htm>. Additional workshops will be conducted over the winter and spring to finalize this work and prepare to incorporate it into the **2015 RI Wildlife Action Plan**, which DEM expects will be available for public review in the fall of 2014.



RI WAP provides a wealth of important information related to wildlife in Rhode Island. It is a substantial undertaking involving a lot of technical information and sometimes difficult decision-making. In order to make the plan more accessible to all of its intended audiences, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Rhode Island Natural History Survey (RINHS), and University of Rhode Island (URI) began collaborating with RI DEM on a project to promote participation by municipalities and other community interests in the development and implementation of the 2015 RI WAP. As part of this collaboration, RINHS created a position for a RI WAP Community Liaison on its staff.

Part of my charge as the new **RI WAP community liaison** is to make sure that the 2015 revision incorporates products that municipalities, land trusts, and other individuals or groups interested in conservation can use to get conservation measures implemented. This may include a series of brochures, maps, or other publications, as well as meetings and workshops. In fulfilling this task, I will be talking with a broad array of individuals who play a role in conservation in Rhode Island in order to find out how best to serve them.

As a native Rhode Islander, I am thrilled to be back in my home state and to have this opportunity to help make Rhode Island a more hospitable place for the plants and animals that



contribute so much to our quality of life! Truly, the local wildlife and natural areas on which they depend *are a huge part of what makes a place home*, and here in Rhode Island we are very fortunate to have such a wealth of diversity packed into our small state. Further, **wildlife conservation has wide ranging benefits for us and for future generations, including protection of the habitats on which these species rely and the safeguarding of our air, water, well-being, and natural heritage.** To that end, I want to help Rhode Islanders realize the immense treasure with which we've all been entrusted as well as the

extent to which wildlife conservation impacts our own welfare. Then I want to help them find ways, big and small, to get common sense conservation on the ground.

You can find more information about the 2015 RI WAP or provide comments on RI DEM's website www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/swap15.htm. You can also feel free to contact me at amanda.freitas@dem.ri.gov to find out more about wildlife conservation in Rhode Island and what you can do to help!